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FM AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3975
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 0995
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 0373
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0148
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 2176
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0085
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 GEORGETOWN 000838

SIPDIS

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WHA/CAR
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SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DISCIPLINED SERVICES VOTE: SMOOTH, BUT A COUPLE
GLITCHES

11. (U) SUMMARY: In a preview of the August 28 elections, members of Guyana's disciplined services voted on August 21. Initially there was confusion over the ballots at a few polling stations and some service members did not find their names on the voters list. This underscores the fallibility of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) voter education efforts -- the same glitches on Election Day could spell much greater confusion. Otherwise, the day proceeded without incident as an estimated 70-80 percent of the services' 8,000 members cast votes. Local and international observers present at the stations have reported that the process went relatively smoothly. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) Members of the Guyana Defense Force (GDF), Guyana Police Force (GPF), Guyana Prison Service and Guyana Fire Service cast their votes August 21 -- a week before the general election -- so they can work on Election Day. Service members voted at 48 polling stations as well as scattered mobile voting stations in Guyana's interior. The independent Stabroek News quoted GECOM chairman Steve Surujbally estimating a turnout of 70-80 percent. Local and international observer groups have not indicated that problems occurred on any widespread scale. Local observer group the Electoral Assistance Bureau, which observed 37 the polling stations, reported that the voting went fairly smoothly.

13. (U) Media reports indicated that some service members initially refused to vote because the ballots lacked a six digit stamp that is normally placed on each ballot at the polling station prior to voting. This prompted GECOM to meet with political party representatives and issue a statement and television advertisement clarifying that the disciplined services' ballots are in fact not supposed to be stamped until they arrive at designated polling places for counting on Election Day. The ballots will then be stamped with the number of that polling station and mixed with the general ballots for counting. (Note: This system is intended to maintain the secrecy of how the disciplined services' vote. It is an improvement over the 2001 election, when their votes -- heavily in favor of the opposition PNC -- were tallied separately then leaked to the press.) This glitch appears to have resulted from poor communication on GECOM's part rather than a conspiracy.

14. (SBU) In addition, media sources as well as Locally

Employed Staff with relatives in the GPF reported instances of voters unable to find their name on the voters list and thus prevented from voting, although the extent of this was unsubstantiated. Of the Chief of Mission's two GPF bodyguards, one voted and the other did not find his name on the voters list -- despite checking the list repeatedly in recent weeks and reporting this omission to his supervisor. Stabroek News reported that the GPF failed to submit accurate information on some of its ranks, and that those who were unable to vote on August 21 would be allowed to vote in the general election on August 28. Georgetown's rumor mill quickly speculated that the ruling People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) was telling police ranks not to vote on August 21 as a way to disenfranchise a group that traditionally supports the opposition PNC -- a far-fetched yet unsurprising theory.

15. (U) The political parties' statements on the process were predictable. Media reports quoted PPP/C spokesman Robert Persaud as saying the process was "smooth and orderly" despite initial confusion. Meanwhile, opposition People's National Congress-One Guyana spokesman Vincent Alexander alleged that "a large number of voters" were unable to find their name on the voters' list and called on GECOM to mount a public relations exercise to ensure similar confusion does not occur on Election Day. Alliance For Change (AFC) Presidential candidate Raphael Trotman also expressed concern about the unstamped ballots.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Less clear is how Guyana's service members voted. The predominately Afro-Guyanese disciplined services have historically supported the PNC, although with the emergence of the AFC as a third-party challenger, this

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support may no longer be taken for granted. The PPP, meanwhile, has been overtly courting joint services' support in recent days. President Jagdeo heaped praise on the joint services after they shot and killed eight men suspected of committing a series of bank robberies August 18 -- an about-face after Jagdeo spent most of 2006 criticizing the GPF and GDF. On August 20, the day before the disciplined services voted, the Government Information Agency also issued a statement from President Jagdeo that the security forces would receive a special allowance for working on Election Day.

17. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: While the disciplined services vote was by most accounts well-run, the initial confusion surrounding the balloting procedures highlights both the failures of GECOM's public relations efforts and the atmosphere of tension and suspicion as Guyana heads toward the August 28 election. GECOM has a very thin margin of error, as administrative details that at first glance may seem mundane could easily become the basis for political unrest. END COMMENT.

Thomas